

October 3, 1958

Dr. Ray D. Owen
Professor of Biology
California Institute of Technology
Pasadena, California

Dear Ray:

To yours of the 30th.

You might say the omission was half-calculated. The postscript was written under great pressure of time, mostly between Stockholm and San Francisco and it certainly could not be considered as a well thought out review of past and contemporary thinking on the problem. And actually I did not have it consciously in mind at the time. Before sending in the revise I did check to see whether your paper did include a detailed anticipation and, while some arguments run parallel your main conclusion seems to be precisely opposed. I must not have expressed this very clearly because a couple of other people have brought up your suggestion (so you can be sure it is not being generally ignored.) If I understand you correctly you were proposing that antigens could induce (i.e. instruct) a change in or near the DNA. I won't foreclose that possibility, but if the change is nucleic (sequence) this is hard to see. So I suggested, as an alternative, that the nucleic pattern changes spontaneously and an apt one then fixed (elected).

There are some more serious omissions in this discussion: especially Talmage, Jerne and Schultz. But I was giving a personal critique expressing its own evolution, i.e., from Burnet. I should patch this up by a more considered review or there may be more serious misunderstandings. I'm giving a Mueller lecture at Harvard next month, along these lines, and your letter provokes the thought that I should amplify the P.S. This will give a chance to give better credit to alternative formulation - I don't mean for priority which neither of us cares much about (and for my own part I lean very heavily on Burnet here) but to clarify the distinctions.

One minor inhibition in communicating with you is the hypermutability of your address. Are you still commuting to Oak Ridge, and if so do you have a schedule.

I sure hope we do see each other more often, but this is predicated on your spending a reasonable part of your time at Pasadena after we move to Stanford. Or do I have it all wrong?

Yours,

Joshua Lederberg